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A Dual Portrait of American Fatherhood

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Fathers today are far more involved with their children than their counterparts four decades ago, but more fathers today also live apart from their kids, according to a new analysis of dads in the United States.

The data, [compiled from a variety of sources by the Pew Research Center](#), paints a striking and sometimes conflicting portrait of American fatherhood. In many cases, men are stepping up, investing far more time in raising their children. At the same time, fathers still spend far less time with their kids than mothers do, and the percentage of children living apart from their fathers has nearly tripled during the past 50 years.

Two out of three fathers say being a father today is a far tougher job than it was 20 to 30 years ago.

According to the Pew report, married fathers in the year 2000 spent an average of 6.5 hours a week as the primary caregiver, providing basic daily care, teaching and playing with their children. That number is up from just 2.6 hours a week in 1960. While that's good news, the role of fathers in daily care is still about half that of mothers, who invest 12.9 hours a week in daily caregiving. Today's mothers also spend more time on their kids than their counterparts in 1965, who invested 10.6 hours a week in caregiving.

Despite this increased time commitment from fathers, the role of many fathers has shifted as more and more dads are living apart from their children.

In 1960, 11 percent of children lived apart from their fathers and 4 percent lived apart from their mothers. Today, 27 percent of children, or about 20.3 million kids, now live apart from their dads, according to data collected from the 2010 U.S. Census. About 8 percent live away from their mothers.

Among fathers who live away from their kids, 27 percent don't visit their children. Another 29 percent visit their kids one to four times a month, and 21 percent visit several times a year. Only 22 percent of dads living away from their kids see their children more than once a week.

Despite those grim statistics, most of today's fathers spend time deeply involved in their children's lives. Among fathers who live with their kids, 93 percent engage in regular

conversation, 94 percent share meals, and 63 percent help with homework, while 54 percent cart children to daily activities. Nearly all fathers of very young children (98 percent) say they regularly play with the child, while 89 percent change diapers, give baths and dress their babies and toddlers. And 60 percent of fathers who live with their kids who are under 5 say they read to their children several days a week.

Even so, not every dad gives himself high marks as a parent. In October 2010, Pew conducted a nationwide survey of 2,691 adults about their attitudes about family. Fathers gave themselves lower marks than mothers did, with only 63 percent of fathers with children younger than 18 saying they were doing an “excellent” or “very good” job as parents. Among mothers, 80 percent rated themselves as excellent or very good parents.